

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**Xinjiang and China's National Security: Counter-Terrorism or Counter-Separatism?**

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The views expressed in this academic research paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense, or any of its agencies.

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## ABSTRACT

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Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack at the World Trade Center, the United States launched a war against terrorism, gaining worldwide support for conducting military action in Afghanistan. China played a significant role in assisting the U.S. by publicly supporting the U.S.-led Global War on Terrorism, by not blocking U.S. sponsored anti-terrorism resolutions in the United Nations Security Council, and by using its influence with Pakistan to secure its direct support for the Afghanistan campaign. In return, China obtained U.S. support for its own anti-terrorism campaign in the Xinjiang province against Islamic-radical separatists, a struggle that had been going on for years but only recently gained significant notoriety. However, several human rights groups and commissions accused the Chinese government of conducting a brutal crackdown, under the guise of counter-terrorism, aimed at suppressing political dissent, religious practices by ethnic minorities, and any activities deemed to threaten stability and order in the region. There is also a perception that the U.S. has not done enough to foster improvements in China's religious freedoms practices in the area, and by its lack of an effective policy, has subordinated its position on religious freedom to other political and economic objectives. This paper reviews the history of the current struggles in Xinjiang, examines the effectiveness of the current U.S. policy on religious freedom in Xinjiang, and proposes an alternative policy of broader diplomatic exchange and increased economic incentives.



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# XINJIANG AND CHINA'S NATIONAL SECURITY: COUNTER-TERRORISM OR COUNTER-SEPARATISM?

## INTRODUCTION

Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack at the World Trade Center, the United States launched a war against terrorism, gaining worldwide support for conducting military action in Afghanistan. China played a significant role in assisting the United States by publicly supporting the U.S.-led Global War on Terrorism, by not blocking U.S. sponsored anti-terrorism resolutions in the United Nations Security Council, and by using its influence with Pakistan to secure its direct support for the Afghanistan campaign. In return, China obtained United States support for its own anti-terrorism campaign in the Xinjiang province against Islamic-radical separatists, a struggle that had been going on for years but only recently gained significant notoriety. Because the Xinjiang region carries enormous strategic importance, both in terms of national security and economic development, China will not allow separatist or terrorist groups to destabilize the area or to establish an independent nation. However, several human rights groups and commissions accused the Chinese government, with the support of the United States government, of conducting a brutal crackdown, under the guise of counter-terrorism, aimed at suppressing political dissent, religious practices by ethnic minorities, and any activities deemed to threaten stability and order in the region. These same groups feel the United States has not done enough to foster improvements in China's religious freedoms practices in the area, and by its lack of an aggressive policy, has subordinated its position on religious freedom to other political and economic objectives. This paper reviews the history of the current ethnic struggles in Xinjiang, examines the effectiveness of the current United States policy on religious freedom in Xinjiang, and proposes an alternative policy.

## GENERAL INFORMATION ON XINJIANG

Xinjiang, also referred to as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) occupies the northwest corner of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Encompassing more than 1,660,000 square miles, the region comprises one sixth of the PRC's landmass making it the largest in the country. Its external border stretches nearly 5,600 km and touches the borders of Afghanistan, Jammu and Kashmir, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia,



FIGURE 1. MAP OF XINJIANG<sup>1</sup>

Pakistan, Russia, and Tajikistan. Internally, the region borders Gansu and Qinghai Provinces, and the Tibet Autonomous Region.<sup>2</sup> The capital of Xinjiang is Urumqi, which lies over 3,000 miles northwest of Beijing.

The region consists of two major basins, both partially surrounded by high mountain ranges. Xinjiang contains a diverse range of geographical features, from desert mountains and high desert plateaus to grasslands, lakes, forests, and low deserts. China's tallest mountain, Tianshan, and the world's second largest desert, Taklimakan, are both located in Xinjiang. The region's location and varied landscape produces a dry continental climate, with extreme seasonal temperatures and very little annual rainfall. Xinjiang contains large untapped deposits of fossil fuels, minerals, and water resources, making it an integral part of China's economic growth.

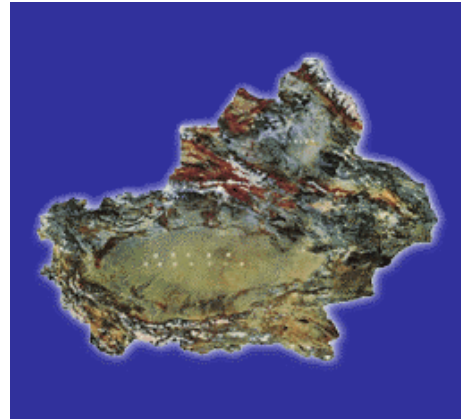


FIGURE 2. TOPOGRAPHICAL MAP OF XINJIANG<sup>3</sup>

Currently, there are 17 million people in Xinjiang, nearly forty percent being Han Chinese and the rest, ethnic minorities.<sup>4</sup> Over the centuries, Xinjiang has been occupied by a broad host of ethnic groups to include Han Chinese, Mongols, Arabs, Uyghurs, Uzbeks, Kazaks, Russians, and Manchurians. There are forty-seven minority groups residing in Xinjiang, the largest being the Uyghurs. The Uyghur population consists of ethnic Turks and Muslims and numbers about seven million.

The Uyghurs claim to be descended from a Turkic-speaking group who migrated to the region from an area now occupied by Mongolia.<sup>5</sup> Over half a million other Uyghurs are reportedly living in surrounding countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. They adopted the Islamic religion during the seventh century. The Uyghurs began settling in the region in 840, following their ouster from what is now known as Kyrgyzstan. In 1017, the Uyghurs would finally gain full control of the region; however, their empire would eventually fall to invading Mongols.<sup>6</sup> In a move to secure its northwest borders, the Qing dynasty annexed the region in 1759, and began calling the area Xinjiang (New Frontier) in 1768. The Uyghurs rebelled several times during the nineteenth century, eventually gaining autonomy in 1877.<sup>7</sup> Throughout most of the twentieth century, the Uyghurs battled the Chinese government for independence, first with the Guomindang-led government (1928-1945), and then with the communist government (post-1949). For a brief

period, 1945-49, the Uyghurs established an independent country called East Turkistan. In 1949, the communist government annexed the area, renamed it the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in 1955, and granted the region's inhabitants some measure of self-rule.

During the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government's oppressive policies against religious and cultural practices by ethnic minorities led to drastic reductions in religious freedoms. In the 1980's, religious practices were allowed to reemerge and resulted in unprecedented growth in practicing Muslims, mosques, and religious schools. Ethnic languages were also reintroduced in schools and official documents. In this environment of greater autonomy, radical Islamism also began spreading as members opened religious schools, trained cadres of followers, used religious activities to conceal separatist gatherings and actions, and advocated terrorism as a means for instigating a change in government.<sup>8</sup> The successes achieved by Islamic separatists in Afghanistan and Chechnya emboldened the radical Muslims in Xinjiang, who hoped to form their own independent state, to initiate a separatist uprising.<sup>9</sup> The Chinese government alleges that radical Muslim separatists from the Uyghur population are primarily responsible for the majority of terrorist activities in the region.

While the total number of ethnic minorities represents a small percentage of China's total population, the majority of them are located in Xinjiang. In an effort to dilute the preponderance of ethnic minorities and "restructure" the demographics, the Chinese government began a deliberate effort to increase Xinjiang's Han population in the late 1940's. Through promises of economic opportunities and development, the central government encouraged the immigration of Han Chinese into the region. In 1948, the Han Chinese made up only fifteen percent of the region's population. By the 1990's the percentage had risen to around forty percent.<sup>10</sup> One notable mechanism used to expand Han settlements in Xinjiang was the formation of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC). The XPCC, also referred to as the *Bingtuan*, is an institution composed primarily of Han Chinese and functions under the direct authority of the Chinese central government. Through the XPCC, Beijing controls most of the industry and resources in Xinjiang and is able to extend its law enforcement control over the region using the XPCC's security and police forces.<sup>11</sup> The XPCC also manages the majority of prisons and labor camps that hold prisoners sent from China proper.

## **XINJIANG'S STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE**

Centuries ago, Xinjiang played a significant role in maintaining China's security and in promoting trade with the West because it straddled major portions of the ancient Silk Road. Today is no different, as China must maintain control and stability within Xinjiang because the

region once again holds considerable economic, strategic, and military importance for the country. With its close proximity to the Central Asian states, Xinjiang is vital to economic trade with the Central Asian states as well as to border security in the region. And because it contains vast natural resources, Xinjiang will play a prominent role in fueling China's future economy by providing energy resources to other parts of the country.

When the Central Asian states gained their independence in the early 1990's, China recognized the new economic and strategic opportunities on its Western borders. Not only a potential customer for China's services and manufactured goods, the Central Asian states were a source of vitally needed oil and gas products. As China's nearest province to the Central Asian states, Xinjiang plays an integral part to developing economic trade with Central Asia. By 1999, Xinjiang established a trans-border railroad and fifteen border crossings in response to increasing trade activity.<sup>12</sup> In 1999, Xinjiang's import and export volume exceeded one billion dollars, accounting for fifty-eight percent of the region's total foreign trade, and making it one of China's largest border trade zones.<sup>13</sup>

China and the Central Asian states also share a common threat, domestic terrorism, which could potentially destabilize the governments in the region. To enhance security on its Western borders and resolve existing border disputes, China signed an agreement in 1996 with Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, who together became known as the "Shanghai Five." Since then, the five countries have held several summits and signed subsequent agreements aimed at reducing military forces along their borders, improving mutual trust, fostering economic cooperation, opposing illegal immigration, eliminating arms and drug trafficking, and combating terrorism. In 2001, Uzbekistan joined the group, and it was renamed the Shanghai Co-operation Organization (SCO). In June 2002, SCO members established the SCO Regional Antiterrorism Organization, with its headquarters located in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan and signed the Convention on the Struggle against Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism.<sup>14</sup> Through these SCO agreements, China sought to prevent the influx of Islamic radicalism to Xinjiang and reduce the possibility that domestic terrorists could escape to safe havens in neighboring countries.

One of the most important reasons for maintaining control of, and stability within Xinjiang, is the presence of large amounts of energy resources in the province. As China's economic development continues to grow, its future demand for energy will increase dramatically, making Xinjiang a important energy supplier. Possession and development of oil, coal, and gas fields in Xinjiang are critical elements for sustaining China's ever-growing energy requirements, especially as its oil production in eastern fields begins to decline. As the third largest consumer

of oil in the world, China imports an average of 2 million barrels a day, making it the second largest oil importer. That number could go up to nearly 10 million barrels a day by 2003.<sup>15</sup> It is estimated that Xinjiang oil and gas productions make up one-third of the entire country's total production.<sup>16</sup> By 2005, it is estimated the Xinjiang will be the country's second largest oil production center and top gas production center.<sup>17</sup> Xinjiang will also play an important role as a conduit for transporting fuel resources from Central Asia to China's central and eastern regions. In 2000, construction began on the Sebei Quadam Basin-Xining-Lanzhou Natural Gas Pipeline, with three others under development.<sup>18</sup> Xinjiang's coal reserves are estimated to be nearly forty percent of the country's total reserves.<sup>19</sup> The loss of oil, coal, or gas production due to terrorist or separatist activities would negatively impact Xinjiang's ability to provide energy to other parts of China, an outcome that China will seek to prevent at all costs.

The loss of Xinjiang to an Islamic separatist movement would also have severe national defense implications. Xinjiang carries enormous military and national defense significance because it is home to China's nuclear ballistic missile arsenal, twelve Army divisions, and six Air Force bases.<sup>20</sup> China maintains its nuclear weapons test site at Lop Nor, Xinjiang. Since the inception of China's nuclear program, Xinjiang has been the primary site for numerous nuclear weapons tests, which the Uyghurs believe, has led to higher than average rates of health-related diseases and defects in their people. This concern is but one of many divisive issues that fuel the Uyghur's resentment of the Chinese central government.

## **DOMESTIC TERRORISM**

Since the 1970's, China has dealt with radical Islamist and separatist violence of varying degrees and severity. The ethnic minority populations, specifically the Uyghurs, seek independence from China because of discriminatory practices, unequal economic benefits that favor the Han population, religious oppression, and the hope of establishing their own country similar to other recently formed Central Asian states.<sup>21</sup> The Uyghurs and the other Turkic ethnic groups in Xinjiang do not have any inherent connection to Han Chinese. Rather, they claim to have originated from Turkey. The founding of new Central Asian states after the fall of the Soviet Union provided new hope and encouragement to the Uyghurs that they could establish their own independent state. The fact that Afghanistan, through armed rebellion, gained its independence from a major world power only instilled more confidence in the Uyghur rebels who hope to replicate the same success against China.

Over the years, the Chinese government reported numerous incidences of violent terrorist activities linked to the East Turkistan Independence Movement (ETIM), such as bombings,

assassinations, riots, and demonstrations. The ETIM has been credited with at least 200 violent terrorist activities, resulting in 162 deaths and 440 cases of injuries.<sup>22</sup> Three notable incidents were an armed rebellion in Baren township (1990), a riot involving thousands of Uyghurs in Yining (1997), and a second riot in Yining protesting the convictions of several Uyghur separatists for their part in the first riot (1997).<sup>23</sup> Following the death of Deng Xiaoping in February 1997, Uyghur terrorists (National United Revolutionary Front) claimed responsibility for three bombing attacks in Urumqi, which resulted in seven deaths and over seventy injuries.<sup>24</sup> In the same year, the violence spread to Beijing as members of the "Eastern Turkistan Liberation Organisation -- Feddayin of Beijing" planted a bomb that exploded on a Beijing bus.<sup>25</sup>

As terrorist activities in Xinjiang became more widely publicized, it became evident that there were multiple terrorist/separatist groups operating in the region (e.g. United Revolutionary Front of East Turkistan, Uyghur Liberation Organization, and the Free Turkistan Movement).<sup>26</sup> Although the Chinese government has alleged for years that the terrorist groups operating in Xinjiang had ties to outside terrorist groups, specifically Usama bin Laden's terrorist group, Al Qaida, it was not until after September 11, 2001 that the United States and other countries officially recognized China's domestic terrorism concerns in Xinjiang. Al Qaida allegedly provided direct support to the ETIM through financial aid, training, and advice. Following the recent military action in Afghanistan, more than a dozen Uyghur Muslim terrorists were captured and sent to the terrorist detention center at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, along with other captured terrorists.<sup>27</sup> Recently, the United States government acknowledged evidence that certain ETIM members were planning terrorist bombing attacks directed at embassies in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, to include the U.S. embassy. Two suspected ETIM members were deported to China from Kyrgyzstan in connection with the planning of these terrorist acts.<sup>28</sup>

#### FREEDOM OF RELIGION IN XINJIANG

Officially, the Chinese government supports the freedom of religious beliefs as long as these practices do not violate other laws. Article 36 of the Constitution states:

"Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief. No State organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion. The State protects normal religious activities. No one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the State. Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination."<sup>29</sup>

“According to Chinese law, while all citizens enjoy the right to freedom of religious belief they must also carry out duties prescribed by law. In China, all individuals and organizations, including all religions, must safeguard the people's interests, the sanctity of the law, ethnic unity and unification of the nation.”<sup>30</sup> The freedom of religious beliefs for ethnic minorities is further protected by the Law of the People's Republic of China on National Regional Autonomy which states: “Organs of self-government in ethnic regional autonomous areas protect the right to freedom of religious belief of the citizens of all ethnic groups. While there is some tolerance afforded to religious practices, the Constitution also stipulates that it is illegal to conduct activities that would split the country along ethnic or religious lines, or to engage in separatist or terrorist activities.”<sup>31</sup>

To demonstrate its respect for ethnic minority cultures and religious beliefs, the Chinese government expended large amounts of resources to reconstruct or build new religious facilities and restore old religious sites having historical significance. Within Xinjiang itself, there are over 23,000 mosques and 29,000 Muslim clerics supporting the religious practices of the Muslim population.<sup>32</sup> With regard to the country's Muslim population, official records show that since 1980, over 45,000 Muslims were allowed to make the pilgrimage to Mecca.<sup>33</sup>

Since the early 1990's, the Chinese central government has come under increasingly strong criticism for its alleged human rights violations and restrictions on religious freedoms in the Xinjiang region, despite the fact that China is a signatory on several international human rights treaties, to include the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are just two of many organizations maintaining that China is guilty of imposing gross human rights violations against ethnic minorities under the guise of combating separatist and terrorist-sponsored violence. According to Amnesty International, Chinese authorities have illegally, unjustly, and cruelly detained, tortured, imprisoned, executed, and punished scores of Uyghurs suspected of being terrorists, of committing terrorist activities, or of having some association with known terrorists.<sup>34</sup> Chinese security forces constantly search religious buildings and scrutinize those who attend Muslim activities in an attempt to uncover illegal separatist publications or materials and to ferret out potential terrorists.<sup>35</sup>

Religious freedoms in the region have also suffered as Chinese officials struggled to mitigate ethnic unrest. Blaming increasing numbers of terrorist-related activities on Muslim separatists, the Chinese Central government launched several campaigns to restore order that involved widespread and indiscriminate arrests, closures of places of worship, restrictions on traditional religious practices and activities, and bans on personal religious practices in state-

controlled institutions (e.g. state-controlled schools and universities).<sup>36</sup> In a crackdown on alleged illegal religious activities, Chinese officials shut down 105 privately-run scripture classes; dispersed 499 students attending underground scripture schools; and closed or changed to other uses 133 mosques that had been built without approval after February 1995. And in the course of investigating and cracking down on religious activities at schools, the authorities denied or revoked teaching certificates for teachers who, even after undergoing re-education, continued to disseminate national separatist views.<sup>37</sup>

Although the Chinese government made significant strides in expanding the freedom of religion in China over the last twenty years, there is still much progress needed to be made. According to the U.S. Department of State and the U.S Commission on International Religious Freedom, the Chinese government continues to violate its citizens' freedom of religion and beliefs and tightly restricts the practice of religious freedoms, resulting in the continued designation of China as a "country of particular concern."<sup>38</sup> Restrictions on freedom of religion are not limited only to the citizens of the Xinjiang region. There are also allegations of a systematic, state-sanctioned campaign against the Falun Gong movement, which includes torture, physical mistreatment, and unexplained deaths of Falun Gong members.<sup>39</sup> There is also a long history of human rights violations associated with the people of Tibet.<sup>40</sup>

#### CHINESE RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC TERRORISM IN XINJIANG

China recently implemented economic programs directed at stimulating development and prosperity in the Western regions. The region's ethnic minorities have not benefited from past economic development programs and they believe the Han immigrants unfairly compete with them for already scarce resources and limited educational and employment opportunities. By raising the standard of living for all Xinjiang residents, the central government hopes to reduce the economic causes for separatism and unrest among the ethnic minorities in the Western regions.<sup>41</sup>

In response to escalating terrorist violence and to central government warnings of expanding terrorist activities in region, the Xinjiang authorities implemented the "Strike Hard" anti-crime campaign in 1996, a strong law enforcement crackdown on separatist organizations and their violent terrorist-related activities.<sup>42</sup> The campaign stopped after several years, however, it was re-launched in 2001 resulting in numerous executions, hundreds of arrests and prison sentences, and the confiscation of a variety of illegal weapons and explosives.<sup>43</sup> The Chinese authorities maintained the campaign due to the continued terrorist activities in the region. In Xinjiang province, Amnesty International reported serious human rights and freedom

of religion violations committed by the Chinese government against the indigenous Uighur population, all under the guise of counter-terrorism.<sup>44</sup>

In December 2001, the Chinese central government passed several significant amendments to its criminal laws that increased punishments for organizing or leading terrorist related crimes, and added punishments for crimes associated with weapons of mass destruction, financial activities linked to terrorism, and illegal activities that disturb social order. Amnesty International alleges that Chinese authorities are using the vague wordings in the amendments and the lack of maximum punishments to arrest and hold indefinitely hundreds of ethnic Muslims, to include those who used non-violent means of disagreement with the government or who were only expressing their religious beliefs.<sup>45</sup> The absence of a maximum punishment for certain crimes could also lead to significant increases in executions, a statistic in which China leads the world.

With its partners in the SCO, the Chinese government established broad cooperative agreements aimed at combating terrorism and separatism in the region. As part of these agreements, adjacent countries will not allow terrorists to operate out of, or seek shelter within their borders, will exchange information on terrorist organizations, and will apprehend and deport escaping terrorists. In October 2002, China held joint military maneuvers against terrorism with Kyrgyzstan; the first time joint exercises were held with a SCO member or with any other country's military.<sup>46</sup> By sharing intelligence regarding terrorist activities and organizations, deporting captured terrorists, and conducting joint anti-terrorism exercises, China is attempting to prevent the indiscriminate movement of terrorists across the borders between Xinjiang and its Central Asian neighbors.

## **ANALYSIS OF UNITED STATES POLICY ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN XINJIANG**

The United States is the world leader in the protection and advancement of human rights and individual freedoms, which includes the freedom of religion. Ideally, the United States would like to see a democratic form of government in China, one that would foster freedom of religious beliefs along Western concepts. For decades, the United States criticized China for its poor human rights record, particularly its suppression of religious freedoms, and used various diplomatic and economic tools to encourage Chinese improvements in the area of religious freedom (e.g. granting of Most Favored Nation status). Beginning in the mid-1990's, the United States appeared to soften its tough stance on human rights in order to achieve economic policy objectives with China, and more recently, in order to gain Chinese support for its war on terrorism.

The current United States policy on the subject of human rights, including the freedom of religion, states the United States Government will:

- “speak out honestly about violations of the nonnegotiable demands of human dignity using our voice and vote in international institutions to advance freedom;
- use our foreign aid to promote freedom and support those who struggle non-violently for it, ensuring that nations moving toward democracy are rewarded for the steps they take;
- make freedom and the development of democratic institutions key themes in our bilateral relations, seeking solidarity and cooperation from other democracies while we press governments that deny human rights to move toward a better future; and
- take special efforts to promote freedom of religion and conscience and defend it from encroachment by repressive governments.”<sup>47</sup>

This policy is in line with the Bush Administration’s general policy of engagement with China--establish open dialogue through political, economic, and cultural exchange, with the objectives of fostering the development of democratic values and practices in China and bringing China within the accepted norms of international behavior. By leveraging our national economic and diplomatic power, the Administration hopes to instill in Chinese society the concepts of promoting and defending individual freedoms and liberty. Up until 1994, granting Most Favored Nation (MFN) trade status was used as an incentive to compel China to abide by international human rights and freedom of religion standards. In 1994, then President Clinton de-linked human rights improvements and the granting of MFN status. In 2000, the United States granted Permanent Normal Trade Relations status to China and subsequently supported China’s entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in an effort to promote democratic reform in China; the hope being that as China became more open to the world, the Chinese people would be exposed to alternative ways of governance and seek greater representation and reform in their own government. The United States would also benefit economically as China’s WTO membership would force the Chinese economy to adopt an open market system governed by a “rule of law” and open up a huge Chinese market to United States companies and their products and services.

In the international arena, the United States used its position on the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) to sponsor and support resolutions censuring China for human rights violations, however, the United States lost its seat on the UNCHR and did not sponsor a resolution in 2002. As a voting member of the World Bank, the United States

liberalized its voting policy allowing China access to more loan assistance as long as the funds were directed at fulfilling “basic human needs.”<sup>48</sup> As the Olympic host country selection process concluded in early 2001, the United States did not strenuously oppose China's selection, but instead hoped that the international community would more closely scrutinize China's human rights record during the next seven years.<sup>49</sup>

Because China was designated a “country of particular concern,” the President, through the Secretary of State, is directed by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to implement certain actions in an effort to promote religious freedom in that country. These actions could include suspension of United States developmental assistance; restrictions on activities of the Export-Import Bank of the United States, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, or the Trade and Development Agency; United States opposition to loans by international financial institutions; and prohibitions on United States government procurement activities. To date, for reasons most likely related to maintaining economic development in China, the United States has only imposed a restriction on the export of crime control and detection instruments and equipment, which the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom cited as inadequate.<sup>50</sup> At the Commission's urging, President Bush, during a recent trip to China, addressed the topic of religious freedom in a speech given to students at Tsinghua University, Beijing, China.<sup>51</sup>

Unfortunately, China has not made significant progress in broadening religious freedoms and relaxing perceived constraints on religious practices in Xinjiang. Many outspoken critics within the United States government and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) publicly state that the freedom of religion has deteriorated in China, they question the effectiveness of the United States policy, and they criticize the United States for its lack of stronger actions against China.<sup>52</sup> The previously mentioned Non-Governmental Organizations (Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch), the government-supported Commission on International Religious Freedom, and the U.S. Department of State cite mounting evidence that indicates how China continues to place limits on religious freedom and cruelly repress non-violent opposition by ethnic minorities, particularly in Xinjiang and Tibet. By not reacting more strongly, the United States has jeopardized its position as one of the world's strongest advocates for religious freedom and made itself vulnerable to world perception and criticism that it subordinates its position on religious freedom to other national issues such as its Global War on Terrorism or economic trade.

## **ALTERNATIVE U.S POLICY OPTIONS**

In order to prevent the perception that it tolerates suppression of religious freedom, the United States will have to adopt a new policy dealing with freedom of religion violations in Xinjiang. In developing alternative policies, the United States can either take a hard line approach in which the United States responds to Chinese freedom of religion violations in Xinjiang by imposing severe economic and political sanctions on China, or the Administration can take a less harsh course of action that is in balance with its current policy of engagement. The ultimate objective of either approach is to improve religious freedom in Xinjiang.

### **OPTION ONE: *SHI YA LI* (EXERT PRESSURE)**

Under this approach, the United States would not hesitate to use harsh economic and diplomatic measures in order to make China improve its religious freedom record in Xinjiang. Should there be little or no progress in the area of freedom of religion in Xinjiang, the United States could impose trade restrictions and cease diplomatic and cultural exchange. In addition, the United States could increase its military presence in Central Asia, beyond the current levels supporting operations in Afghanistan.

With China striving to become more engaged in the global economy, economic sanctions could be an effective “stick” to pressure China into reforms, especially since China is struggling to sustain its rapid economic development. The United States could force all Chinese businesses wishing to do business with United States firms to undergo strict scrutiny and administrative procedures to verify they are not linked to activities or organizations that suppress religious freedom in Xinjiang. Linking United States support of international bank loans for China to improving religious freedom in Xinjiang is another tool to compel China to change. For a greater effect, the United States could enlist the support of its trading partners in enforcing its economic sanctions with China.

The United States could provide greater public support and possibly financial aid for the persecuted Uyghur groups who advocate non-violent means of resistance to Chinese repression. In addition, the State Department could initiate diplomatic contacts with non-violent Uyghur groups who are currently in exile. Through international human rights groups, the United States could monitor China’s “counter-terrorism” activities in Xinjiang and publicly denounce those actions that are deemed extremely harsh, that violate accepted international standards of human rights, or that target Muslims participating in peaceful anti-government activities or religious practices.

To further reinforce the United States' opposition to religious freedom violations in Xinjiang, the Administration could cease diplomatic exchanges and visits with China. The cessation of diplomatic exchange could include meetings and committees dealing with religious freedom and human rights, and then extend to higher level meetings. Cultural exchanges such as visits by sports teams and fine arts groups, could be denied pending religious freedom improvements in Xinjiang.

Establishing or continuing existing bilateral military and economic agreements with Russia and the Central Asian states, and increasing the number of military forces in Central Asia would blunt China's attempts to gain leverage and economic dominance in the Central Asian region, and put United States more military forces on Xinjiang's western borders. Currently, the United States has military forces in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. The presence of United States forces on her western border weakens China's political influence in the region and reverses the political gains it made after forming the SCO. Future negotiations with China over improving freedom of religion in the area could be linked to the future presence of United States forces in the region.

Although there is a possibility of forcing China to abide by international standards regarding freedom of religion, there are significant obstacles and risks with the '*Shi Ya Li*' approach. Short of a severe human rights violation, similar to the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989, it would be extremely difficult to muster a multilateral imposition of economic sanctions on China. And historically, unilateral economic sanctions are not effective and generally penalize United States companies. The combination of losing a large source of cheap labor and a huge market for our products would significantly set back the United States economy and potentially delay our own economic recovery.

Any United States support for, what China labels as Muslim terrorists in Xinjiang, whether or not they have been shown to be non-violent, would be hypocritical and at cross-purposes with our current War on Terrorism. The creation of a double standard in which the United States fights terrorism aimed solely at the United States and supports terrorist groups involved in other countries would severely damage world support for the United States' War on Terrorism and gravely undermine the trust afforded by countries in Central Asia. Any country involved with suppressing domestic terrorism or violent separatist activities (e.g. Khazakstan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Philippines, etc...) would have reservations in dealing with the United States regarding anti-terrorism issues, since the United States could, at anytime, begin supporting the separatist groups under the guise of promoting religious freedom.

The cessation of diplomatic dialogue would set-back progress on other political, economic, and security issues (e.g., war on terrorism, bilateral trade, etc.). Open communication between our respective governments is critical to promoting candor and understanding of our strategic positions and intentions. In addition, closed communication lines increase the risk of misunderstandings and incorrect assessments of motives between our two countries. The United States would also benefit whenever it can obtain China's support and assistance in addressing North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

Another difficulty is that the United States has a credibility problem with trying to promote and enforce human rights in other countries due its own human rights inconsistencies. The United States has not ratified several key international rights treaties and covenants (e.g. International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, the first and second optional protocols to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women), and diluted signed treaties with reservations that exempt the United States from international standards that are more restrictive than existing United States laws.<sup>53</sup> With regard to international scrutiny of human rights, the United States is reluctant to reprimand its allies nor does it accept criticism of its own human rights record. Since the United States maintains open relations with countries, such as Myanmar and Indonesia, known to repress the religious freedoms of their people, the United States would set a double standard on the issue of religious freedom and would lose credibility were it to impose restrictions on China.

#### OPTION TWO: *BU ZHAN ER HE* (HARMONY WITHOUT FIGHTING)

With the "*Bu Zhan Er He*" option, the United States would take a softer approach, one that takes the current policy and adds more aggressive diplomatic actions, includes some economic incentives, and does more to raise freedom of religion issues world-wide, in order to encourage China improve religious freedom in Xinjiang. The current policy focuses on engaging China economically and diplomatically with the goal of exposing the Chinese people to democratic values and beliefs, in the hopes that China would adopt a society that promotes individual rights and freedoms along Western ideals. In addition to engagement and exchange, the "*Bu Zhan Er He*" option would employ financial aid and economic incentives and stronger and broader diplomatic actions.

Specifically, the United States could tie selective trade agreements and financial aid for China to improvement of freedom of religion practices (e.g. Approving World Bank loans aimed at fulfilling basic human needs such as construction of medical facilities, providing financial aid

to programs that promote religious freedom in Xinjiang or provide humanitarian aid to ethnic minorities in the region, restricting trade in industries linked to the suppression of human rights and religious freedom, restricting trade with businesses and industries linked to the Xinjiang area, or opposing non-humanitarian aid loans until the government demonstrates improved conduct in the area of freedom of religion). To avoid the perception of bias, these incentives and restrictions must be applied to all bilateral and multilateral agreements with countries seeking to do business with the United States. These programs would not apply to all trade agreements since the United States would not want to encumber all economic arrangements with bureaucratic impediments. Rather, the economic incentives and restrictions would target industries, companies, and financial assistance programs that affect the promotion of freedom of religion in Xinjiang or provide humanitarian aid. The trade or sale of military equipment and intellectual property or dual use technology to China would continue to be prohibited.

On the diplomatic front, the United States would encourage international organizations (IO) and NGOs to prompt China for more progress, strongly link diplomatic engagements with human rights/freedom of religion dialogue, and establish more exchange programs to expose Chinese leaders and citizens to the benefits of democratic processes and individual freedoms. By garnering multilateral support for the actions of IOs/NGOs such as the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch, the United States can draw increased international attention and focus on China's religious freedom record and through international pressure, compel China to abide by international standards regarding freedom of religion. Although it is no longer a member of the UN Commission on Human Rights, the United States should urge current UNCHR members to propose a resolution during annual sessions to censure China as long as there is evidence of serious freedom of religion violations. The United States should convince China to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. As China prepares for the 2008 Olympics in Beijing and the World Fair in 2010, the United States, along with the international community, should closely monitor China's actions for the next several years and pressure the government into freedom of religion improvements or face potential boycotts or walkouts.

Any future diplomatic summits or meetings must include the subjects of human rights and freedom of religion on the agenda and allow United States officials to present publicly these issues to China's citizens. The United States government should pressure China to allow Department of State and international observers into Xinjiang who could monitor and record improvements in, or violations of, religious freedom. Washington could also request that the Chinese government permit the United States to establish an embassy or consulate in Xinjiang,

which would allow additional opportunities to monitor and record freedom of religion improvements. And finally, the United States and China should reinstitute cultural, military, and diplomatic exchange programs, which would enable the two countries to learn more about each other and better understand each other's perspectives on religion, individual freedom, and military intent and capabilities.

A biggest potential weakness in this "engagement" approach is that it may lack the strength to force quick improvements or any improvements at all, to China's religious freedom record in Xinjiang. The financial aid and economic incentives may not carry enough force to compel China to ameliorate religious conditions in Xinjiang. The economic restrictions would be difficult to enforce, difficult to apply to all trade partners, and may not significantly influence China's behavior since the restrictions are limited to a narrow segment of the China's economy. Any progress in Xinjiang made by the Chinese government may not satisfy the NGOs in their desire for faster reforms, and there is the problem of the United States' lack of credibility in trying to promote and enforce human rights in other countries due its own human rights inconsistencies. In the attempt to address the Chinese people and to position observers in Xinjiang, the United States could come across as overbearing and arrogant, resulting in a backlash against perceived American intervention in Chinese domestic issues. And the increased presence of Chinese nationals in the United States could resurrect the fears of Chinese espionage activities and threats to our national security.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The United States government should adopt the "*Bu Zhan Er He*" policy option, a combination of broader, aggressive diplomatic actions and increased economic incentives/restriction. The current United States policy, while consistent with the overall China policy of engagement, does not apply enough pressure on the Chinese government to change at a pace acceptable to the United States. Many non-governmental groups and a few critics on Capital Hill feel the Administration has subordinated its policy on religious freedoms in favor of economic development and the current Global War on Terrorism. The "*Shi Ya Li*" policy of harsh diplomatic and economic sanctions is equally a poor choice because it could result in an isolated China; one that reverts to tightened control over religious freedom, obstructs United States international initiatives, and acts unpredictably in the international community. In light of recent United States and Chinese actions that could be characterized by cooperation and moderation, there appears to be a stronger potential for success by a policy geared towards engagement as opposed to one of containment.

During the twenty-four months leading up to September 11, 2001, the U.S.-Sino relationship had deteriorated to levels not seen since the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989. Given President Bush's characterization of China as a "strategic competitor," allegations of Chinese espionage activities in the United States, the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, China's role in the proliferation of missile technology, United States arms sales to Taiwan, and the EP-3 incident near Hainan Island, it is plain to see how strained the relationship between the two countries had become.

After September 11, 2001, cooperation and open relations between the United States and China began to improve dramatically. As the United States began to build worldwide consensus for its war on terror, it initiated diplomatic actions to gain China's support and assistance. At the urging of the PRC, in August of 2002, the United States added the ETIM group to its list of terrorist organizations and froze its assets.<sup>54</sup> The next month, the UN followed suit and added the ETIM group to its list of terrorist groups with ties to Usama bin Laden.<sup>55</sup> In October 2002, U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft opened an office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Beijing for the purpose of coordinating cooperative law enforcement activities with the Chinese against terrorism, illegal drug trafficking, and other transnational crimes.<sup>56</sup>

In addition to China's cooperation with the United States Global War on Terrorism, there have been other signs that China seeks to become accepted as a more moderate state and to be viewed as a diplomatic leader in the international community. In October 2002, China freed an imprisoned Tibetan nun and, for the first time in 20 years, allowed two high-level envoys of the Dalai Lama to visit Tibet.<sup>57</sup> Also during October, the Chinese government announced its decision to establish additional rules governing the export of missile technology and dual-use biological and chemical agents, and tightened military export regulations.<sup>58</sup> In November 2002, China signed several agreements with countries in Southeast Asia, which will establish the world's largest free trade zone and defuse potential and long-standing territorial disputes in the area.<sup>59</sup> During a recent United States-China Human Rights Dialogue in Beijing, which included a United States visit to Xinjiang, Chinese officials acknowledged that China's human rights practices did not meet international standards and agreed to extend unconditional invitations to United Nations observers to discuss religious freedom, torture, and arbitrary arrests.<sup>60</sup> In its 2002 annual Report to Congress on China's World Trade Organization Compliance, the United States Trade Representative stated that while China still had much work to do, the country had made significant progress in complying with WTO rules and regulations.<sup>61</sup>

## CONCLUSION

An approach combining broader diplomatic actions and enhanced economic incentives, as described in the “*Bu Zhan Er He*” (Harmony without fighting) policy option, has the best opportunity to compel China to change its policies on religious freedom in Xinjiang, and will foster positive developments in Sino-US relations. Diplomatic actions would include encouraging international organizations (IO) and NGOs to prompt China for more progress, strongly linking diplomatic engagements with human rights/freedom of religion dialogue, and establishing more exchange programs to expose Chinese leaders and citizens to the benefits of democratic processes and individual freedoms. On the economic side, the United States would tie selective trade agreements and financial aid for China to improvement of freedom of religion, targeting industries, companies, and financial assistance programs that affect the promotion of freedom of religion in Xinjiang or provide humanitarian aid. Because Xinjiang possesses vital strategic and economic importance for China’s future, the United States must recognize that China will do what is necessary to maintain control over Xinjiang. At the same time, China must understand that violations of religious freedoms will not be tolerated in the world community. China will respond to multilateral pressure from the international community and to opportunities for increased financial aid and economic trade. This policy would also strengthen United States-China diplomatic and cultural relations and reduce the risk of obstructing bilateral economic trade and development.

As China's economy, society and government become more open and liberalized, the ruling party will realize that individual freedoms, such as freedom of religion, would help promote stability and unity in the Xinjiang area. Until Xinjiang no longer experiences terrorist violence, China will undoubtedly continue its campaign to subdue terrorist activities in the region. United States support of China's anti-terrorism programs in Xinjiang must not be interpreted by the Chinese central government that it has Washington's tacit approval to conduct unfettered human rights violations against the Uyghurs under the guise of combating terrorism.

WORD COUNT= 7,407

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